

International Education: “Focus on Child Soldiers”

This lesson should take from one to two 45-60 minute sessions, depending upon the number of activities chosen.

Reference Material: *Exploring Humanitarian Law Educational Pack for Teachers and Learners*, American Red Cross, 2002

* Note to Teacher: The concept of children’s rights and of society’s responsibilities to children are critical issues and ones in which students display considerable interest. Some of the following material tends to be geared more toward the older student. It is recommended that the teacher consider the audience prior to choosing specific readings or activities.

I. Content:

I want my students to understand (or be able to):

- A. Identify where in Latin America, as well as in other regions of the world, children are used in armed combat.
- B. Identify what is being done in the world to halt the use of child soldiers.

II. Prerequisites: In order to fully appreciate this lesson, the student must be familiar with the basic rules of international humanitarian law. All student handouts and teacher handouts are taken from *Exploring Humanitarian Law* produced by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Monrovia.

III. Instructional Objective(s):

The student will:

- A. Become aware of the scope of the practice of using children as soldiers and its consequences
- B. Understand the need for a minimum age for recruitment
- C. Know that recruitment of children under 15 into armed groups is a violation of IHL (International Humanitarian Law), and that efforts are currently under way to raise the minimum age to 18

IV. Materials and Equipment

Teacher: Two Photo Collages: Exploration 2C “Focus on child soldiers” and Resource 1, **Teacher Handout #1**

“What are the basic rules of international humanitarian law?”

Student Handout #1

Graph: “What should be the minimum age for combatants?”

Teacher Handout #2, (overhead transparency)

Overhead Projector

Readings: “Six Child Soldiers”, **Student Handout #2**

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Map: “Countries where there are currently child soldiers – 2001”,
Teacher Handout #3
Student: Two Photo Collages: Exploration 2C “Focus on child soldiers”
and Resource 1, **Teacher Handout #1**
“What are the basic rules of international humanitarian law?”
Student Handout #1:
Readings: “Six Child Soldiers”, **Student Handout #2**
Map: Countries where there are currently child soldiers – 2001”,
Teacher Handout #3

V. Instructional Procedure:

- A. Write this quotation on the board: **“Children are (...) sacred for all, regardless of nationality and religion. Protecting children is a duty.”** Dr. Adnan Houbballah, “Le virus de la violence”, 1996. Have students offer interpretations in their own words.
- B. Continue discussion with these possible questions:
 1. What is a “child”?
 2. At what age do you stop calling a young person a “child”?
 3. What are the basic needs of children?
 4. What can happen if these needs are not met?
- C. Distribute the photo collages of child soldiers from around the world (**Teacher Handout #1**). Have each student or group choose one photo and explain why they chose it.
- D. Divide students into groups, and have each group discuss the following questions and reach an agreement on a minimum age for recruitment.
 1. Should there be an age limit for someone to be recruited into an armed force?
 2. What should this age limit be? Why?
- E. Present the graph (**Teacher Handout #2**) on the overhead: “What should be the minimum age for combatants?” After discussing the graph, ask the students if they think there should be an international law to limit the age of recruitment. Why?
- F. Compare results of the groups. Then, distribute handout: “What are the basic rules of international humanitarian law?” (**Student Handout #1**) Read aloud as a group, providing explanation where necessary. Have students compare their conclusions with the minimum age currently set by international humanitarian law. Remind students that, despite the law, the recruitment of children under 15 into military groups continues in many parts of the world. (In February 2002, the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child raised the minimum age of compulsory recruitment in the armed forces to 18 years and the minimum age of voluntary enlistment to 16 years.)

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- G. Continue discussion by asking these possible questions: Since international law prohibits the recruitment of children into armed groups, why is it that children become combatants? In your opinion, why do some armed groups want to use children as combatants? Why would youths join a military group?

Sample Responses

Why commanders want them:

- * they don’t question; they follow orders
- * they can be easily controlled
- * they can be made martyrs
- * need for soldiers
- * they are not fully aware of the danger

Why youths might join:

- * revenge, anger
- * no parental/family support
- * self-protection
- * poverty, means of survival
- * from a tradition that places a high value on combat, war heroes, possibly martyrdom
- * peer-group pressure

- H. Distribute *teacher-selected* readings from “Six Child Soldiers” **Student Handout #2**). Read aloud pausing to discuss:
1. What did the child experience?
 2. What do you think the effect on the child’s community might be?
 3. How did becoming a soldier affect these children’s lives and future?
- I. Present the map: “Countries where there are currently child soldiers – 2001.” (**Teacher Handout #3**) Ask students: What conclusions can be drawn from this map? What can be said about the use of child soldiers in our region of the world? (For example, the use of child soldiers exists in many countries, on several continents in both the northern and southern hemispheres and not just in “developing countries”.)

VI. Assessment / Evaluation:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to write a short paragraph defining the term *child soldier*, discussing possible reasons why children become combatants, and what is being done in the world to halt the use of child soldiers.

VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:

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| 6-9.GWH.2.3.2 | Describe major physical characteristics of regions in the Western Hemisphere. |
| 6-9.GWH.2.3.3 | Describe major cultural characteristics of regions in the Western Hemisphere. |
| 6-9.GWH.5.1.4 | Discuss present conflicts between cultural groups and nation-states in the Western Hemisphere. |

Course of Study: Geography and Cultures–Western Hemisphere Grade Level: 6
Instructional Block / Theme: Focus on Latin America: South America

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VIII. Follow Up or Extension Activities:

- A. Child Poster: Create a poster with words, pictures, rights, etc. that *should* represent the life of a child.
- B. Examine current news sources to identify regions and/or groups that are currently violating the basic rules of international humanitarian law regarding the use of child soldiers. (**Teacher Handout #4**)

Student Handout 1

Exploring Humanitarian Law, Education modules for young people

What are the basic rules of international humanitarian law?

1 Attacks must be limited to combatants and military targets.

- 1.1 Civilians may not be attacked.
- 1.2 Civilian objects (houses, hospitals, schools, places of worship, cultural or historic monuments, etc.) may not be attacked.
- 1.3 Using civilians to shield military targets is prohibited.
- 1.4 It is prohibited for combatants to pose as civilians.
- 1.5 Starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited.
- 1.6 It is prohibited to attack objects that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population (foodstuffs, farming areas, drinking water installations, etc.).

2 Attacks or weapons which indiscriminately strike civilian and military objects and persons, and which cause excessive injury or suffering are prohibited.

- 1.7 It is prohibited to attack dams, dykes or nuclear power plants if such attack may cause severe losses among the civilian population.
- 2.1 Specific weapons are prohibited – chemical and biological weapons, blinding laser weapons, weapons that injure the body by fragments which escape detection by X-rays, poison, anti-personnel land mines, etc.
- 2.2 It is prohibited to order or to threaten that there shall be no survivors.

3 Civilians, wounded combatants, and prisoners should be spared, protected and treated humanely.

- 3.1 No one shall be subjected to physical or mental torture, corporal punishment or cruel or degrading treatment.
- 3.2 Sexual violence is prohibited.
- 3.3 Parties to the conflict must search for and care for enemy wounded and sick who are in their power.

Student Handout 1

- 3.4 It is prohibited to kill or wound an enemy who is surrendering or who is hors de combat.
- 3.5 Prisoners are entitled to respect and must be treated humanely.
- 3.6 Taking hostages is prohibited.
- 3.7 Forced displacement of the civilian population is prohibited. What is called “ethnic cleansing” is prohibited.
- 3.8 People in the hands of the enemy have the right to exchange news with their families and to receive humanitarian assistance (food, medical care, psychological support, etc.).
- 3.9 Vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women and nursing mothers, unaccompanied children, the elderly, etc., must be given special protection.
- 3.10 IHL prohibits recruitment and participation in hostilities of children below the age of 15 years.
- 3.11 Everyone is entitled to a fair trial (impartial tribunal, regular procedure, etc.). Collective punishment is prohibited.

4 Military and civilian medical personnel and facilities (hospitals, clinics, ambulances, etc.) must be respected and protected and must be granted all available help for the performance of their duties.
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- 4.1 The red cross or red crescent emblem symbolizes the protection of medical personnel and facilities. Attacks on persons or objects wearing the emblem are prohibited. Using the emblem falsely is prohibited.
- 4.2 Medical units and transports shall not be used to commit acts harmful to the enemy.
- 4.3 In the treatment of the wounded and sick, no priority should be given except on medical grounds.

Student Handout 1

Definitions

collateral damage: Damage or loss caused incidentally during an attack undertaken despite all necessary precautions designed to prevent, or in any event to minimize, loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects

hors de combat: described combatants that have been captured, have been wounded or are sick or shipwrecked and thus are no longer in a position to fight

civilian: any person who is not a combatant (In case of doubt, person shall be considered to be a civilian.)

If and for such time as civilians take a direct part in hostilities, they become combatants and lose their protection.

civilian objects: any objects that are not military targets

If and for such time as civilian objects are used in support of military action, they become military targets and lose their protection.

combatant: person taking direct part in hostilities or member of the armed forces

military targets: combatants and objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose destruction offers a definite military advantage.

Student Handout 2

Six Child Stories

Zaw Ltun's story

I was recruited by force, against my will. One evening while we were watching a video show in my village, three army sergeants came. They checked whether we had identification cards and asked if we wanted to join the army. We explained that we were under age and hadn't got identification cards. But one of my friends said he wanted to join.

I said no and came back home that evening, but an army recruitment unit arrived next morning at my village and demanded two new recruits. Those who could not pay money had to join the army, they said. I [his family] could not pay, so altogether 19 of us were recruited in that way and sent to an army training center.

Myo Win's story

We were drugged and ordered to move forward on the battlefield. We did not know what sort of drug or alcohol we were given but we drank it because we were very tired, very thirsty and hungry.

We had walked for two whole days under very hot burning sun. The hill [battlefield] had no shade, trees were burnt and artillery shells were exploding everywhere. We were so scared, very thirsty, and some of us collapsed due to over-tiredness. But we were beaten from behind [by the officers] and had to move forward. One [of us] got killed.

Susan's story (not her real name)

One week after I was abducted [139 girls were taken one night from her school], I was given to a man. He was 30 years old. Two girls were given to him. When I got to [the camp], I had syphilis.

One boy tried to escape, but he was caught. They made us kill him with a stick. I refused to kill him and they told me they would shoot me. They pointed a gun at me so I had to do it. They made us smear his blood on our arms. They said we had to do this so we would not fear death and so we would not try to escape. It disturbs me so much that I inflicted death on other people. I still dream about the boy from my village who I killed. I see him in my dreams, and he is talking to me and saying I killed him for nothing, and I am crying.

Renuka's story

The rebels came to our school every month and talked to us. They said it was our duty to join them and help save our people from the government army. Because we are so poor, my family often cannot eat. One day, when I was 11, I was so hungry that I left home

Student Handout 2

without telling my parents and went to their camp. I was well fed; but I could not go to visit my family until I fought on the front lines.

After two years, I was assigned to an all-female fighting group to go into battle. Under the assault of the government army, everyone one in my group was dead except me. I was supposed to swallow my cyanide pill to keep from being captured, but I didn't want to die.

– Adapted from article by Celia W. Dugger, *New York Times* 9 September 2000

Malar's story

My father died of a heart attack when I was three and my mother got sick when I was six and she never came home from the hospital; so I lived with my uncle. When I was eight, a woman from the rebel group came and told me they would educate me and care for me. I thought it was better to go with her because of our poverty. I also wanted to contribute to freedom.

When I was 12, I volunteered to go to war. I wanted to save the country.

Last month the government soldiers threw a grenade in our bunker. All ten of the girls with me there died. The soldiers finished them off. Now I am here in jail, but I will fight again because of the army's attacks on our people.

– Adapted from article by Celia W. Dugger, *New York Times*, 9 September 2000

Samuel's Story

In the house of a Christian militia leader overlooking the port, a group of young fighters gathered to tell war stories to visiting reporters and to show off their homemade guns and bombs.

Samuel is 12 years old. Speaking nervously in staccato phrases, Samuel said he had been in "many fights". "If my mother told me not to go, I'd go anyway", he said. Samuel is the youngest in a group of young fighters know as "agas", an acronym that translates as "church boys beloved by God". Their task is to set fire to Muslim homes and mosques, as well as throw bombs made of sulfur, gunpowder, and metal fragments. Adult fighters say they are nimble and brave.

When foreign reporters asked Samuel what he was fighting for, a man to one side prompted: "To defend the Christians", and the youngster repeated the words. His older friends seemed more at ease, but Samuel's expression was disturbingly vacant. Asked what he did in his spare time, he answered: "I make bombs".


Source: article by Diarmid O'Sullivan, *Boston Globe*, 6 September 2000

Teacher Handout 1




Limits in armed conflict

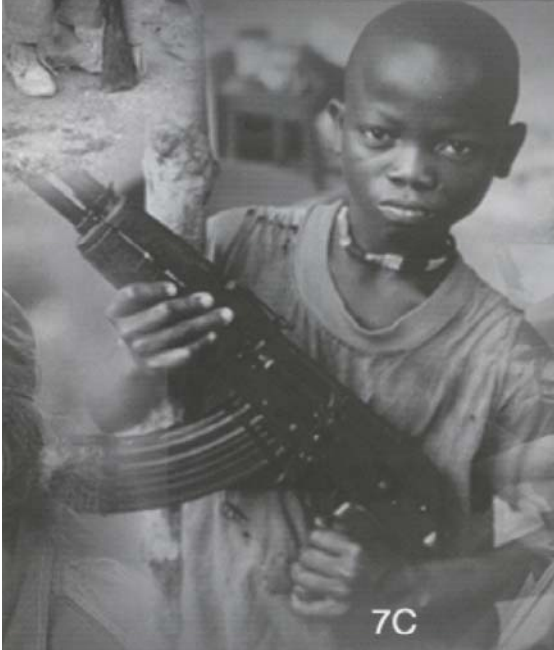
Teacher Handout 1




3C

Resource 1





7C

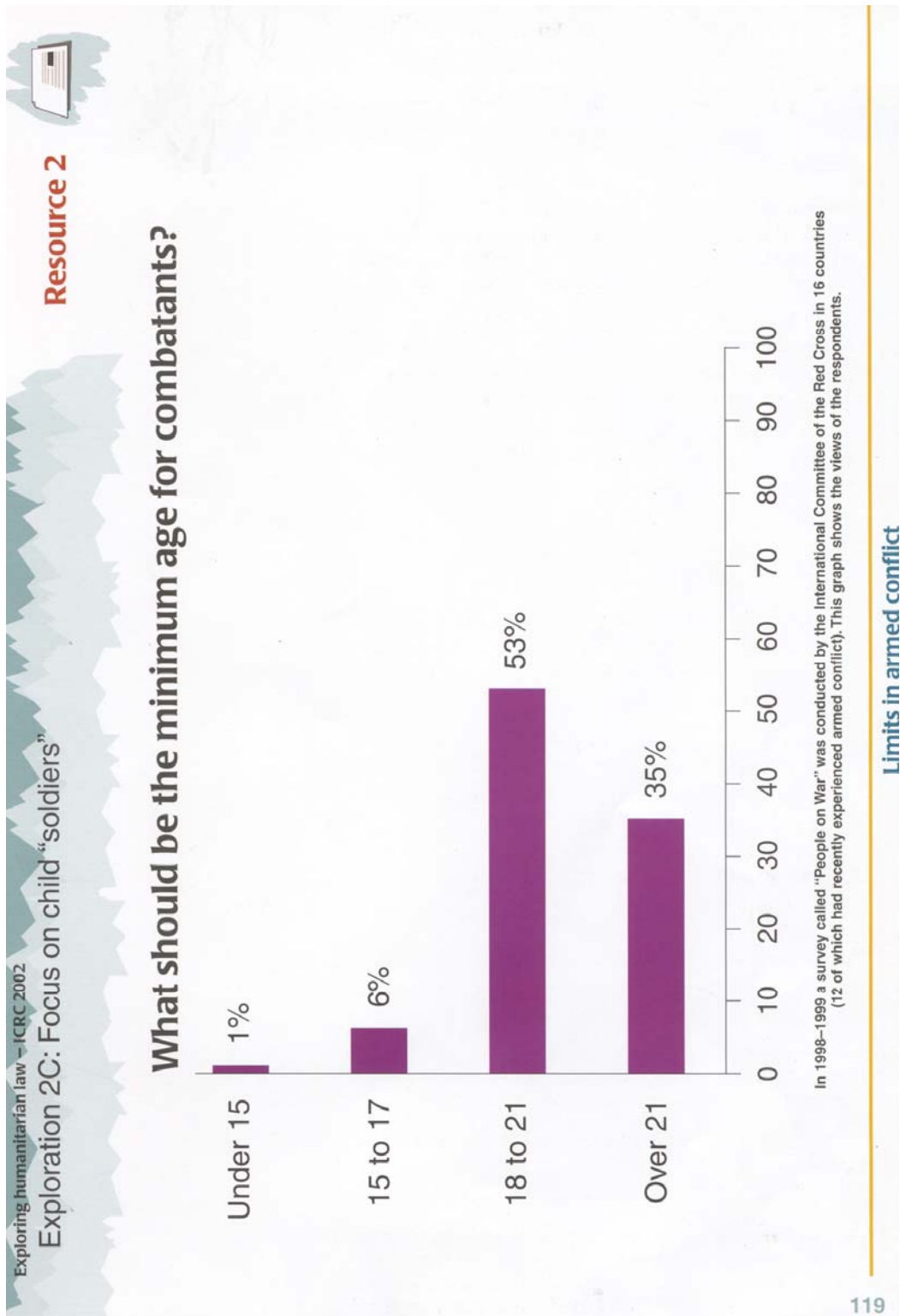


6C

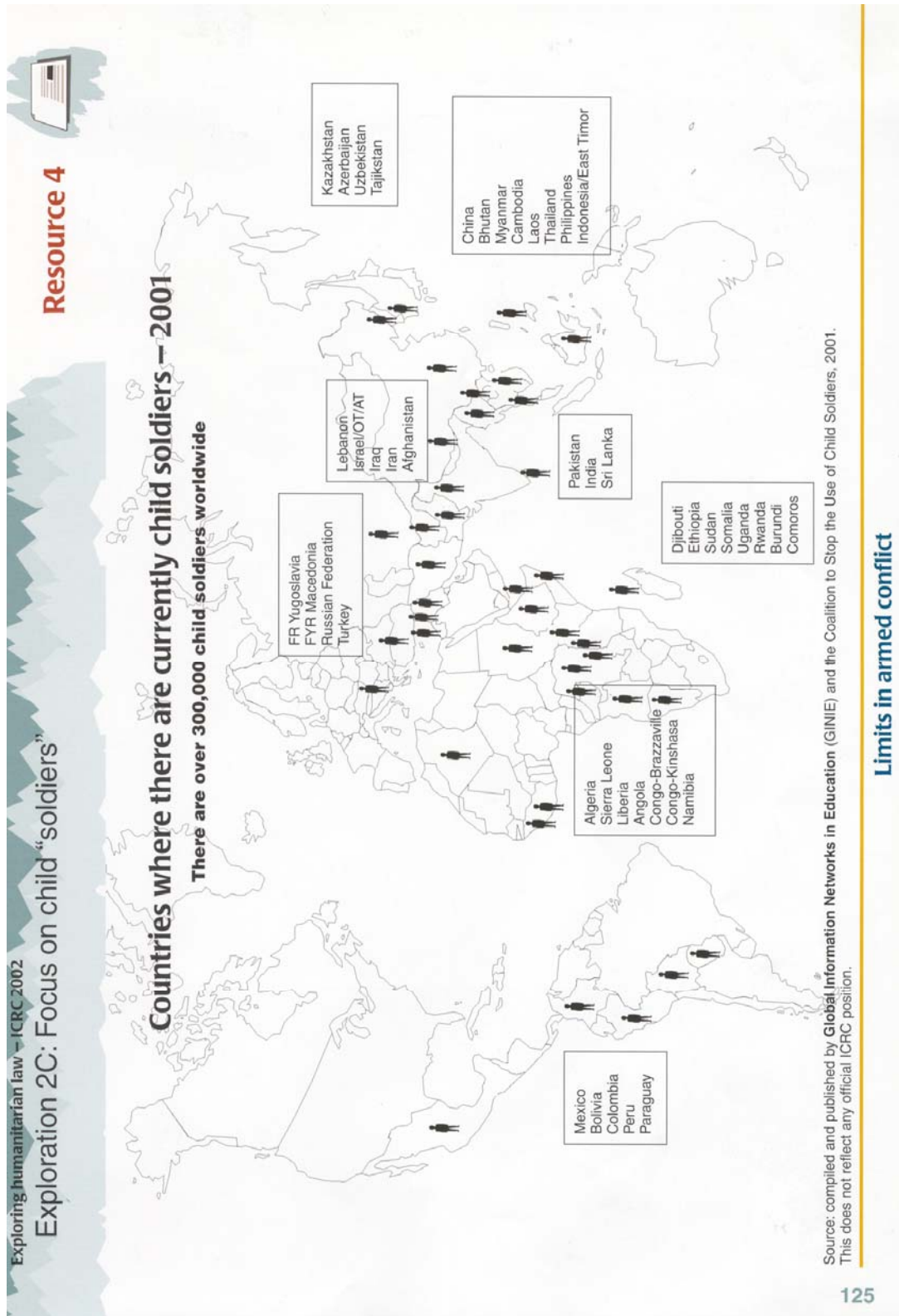
1C Child Soldier, Yemen. Photo: Giacomo Prozzi/Panos Pictures; 2C Mujaheddin Child Soldiers, Afghanistan, 1990. Photo: Didier Brignard / ICRC; 3C Teenage Karenni soldiers who have just graduated into the army, packing up camp and heading for the front line. Photo: Panos Pictures; 4C A young Cambodian soldier. Photo: Ou Nhatly/AP; 5C Janis 14, plays with a parrot while she rests from duty in a rebel camp in southern Colombia. Photo: Ricardo Salazar/AP; 6C Young soldiers of Zairian rebel army sit on the tarmac of an airport before the start of a military parade. Photo: Remy de la Maunier/AP; 7C A 12-year-old member of government-allied Kamajor (civil defence forces), Sierra Leone, 1996. Photo: Giacomo Prozzi / UNICEF.

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Teacher Handout 2



Teacher Handout 3



Teacher Handout 4

U.N.: Tamil Tigers again recruiting child soldiers

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka – Tamil Tiger rebels have increased recruitment of child soldiers as Sri Lanka's peace process falters, the U.N. children's agency said Monday.

In the past two months, 124 children had been recruited, including 74 boys and 50 girls, said Geoffrey Keele, spokesman of the U.N. children's agency.

"There has been a lot more recruitment in April and May than there was in March," Keele said, "It's a major concern."

Tamil rebels agreed with UNICEF a year ago to release all child combatants to a rehabilitation center where the children are given counseling opportunities to resume studies and recreation.

But at least 1,263 children still remain in rebel ranks, Keele said.

The surge is the highest since the guerrillas freed over 1,000 child fighters after bloody factional fighting within Tamil Tiger ranks ended on April 12.

The Idaho Statesman, Tuesday, June 15, 2004